

MECHANICAL MEMORIES MAGAZINE

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*The only UK magazine dedicated to
vintage coin-operated amusement machines*

Mechanical Memories Magazine

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Editorial

Hello, and here we are with the February magazine. Now, I have some important news this month – we're hoping to run a spring auction! Nothing has yet been confirmed, but there is a probability that we will be offering a private collection, which will include some very special machines. If it goes ahead, the auction will take place at our usual venue in Coventry and will be in May, probably on the 11th or 18th. So keep those two dates free – I hope to have firm news next month.

You'll remember last month I said we would be featuring a visitor attraction with lots of slots in this issue of the magazine. I think we've more or less covered all the slottie venues over the years, but there has been one major attraction that has so far been missed – Watermouth Castle. For years I've been banging on about someone writing something about this venue, why? Because it hosts one of the finest and largest collections of amusement machines in the country.

Anyway, Richard Goddard has finally come to the rescue and taken his family for a day out at Watermouth (and he wasn't disappointed). Richard's written an excellent account of his visit, and has also supplied me with a huge number of photos (he must have used up a couple of rolls of film)! I've included a good number of his pictures with the article, but there just wasn't space for them all. However, I shall post all the pictures on the pennymachines site, in colour of course. So many thanks to Richard for an excellent article on an excellent venue.

Until next time

All the best

Jerry

Front Cover picture: *'Moonraker' at Watermouth Castle. Probably the last remaining example of this huge machine, by Rolite Products of Bridlington. See page 8 for Richard's article.*

Dreamland

MARGATE

Save Dreamland Update February 2014

DREAMLAND LEGEND PASSES AWAY

News has reached the Save Dreamland Campaign that one of Dreamland's most well known characters has died. Henry Frederick Smith, an extremely popular travelling showman, who had many rides in Dreamland during the 1970s up until 1982, brought the first Orbiter in the world to the park.

He died on 12 December 2013, three days shy of his 78th birthday, after a long and hard battle with Parkinson's disease, which his grandson Henry Martin told the Campaign "slowly but surely robbed him of all the things he loved".

The photograph below shows Henry Smith with his fleet of vehicles.



DREAMLAND ON THE ONE SHOW

Dreamland was featured on BBC One's The One Show with Chris Evans on Friday 31st January 2014. The show included extensive footage of the park through the years, mixed with interviews with various people involved in the rebuilding of the site. The project's creative designer Wayne Hemingway joined Chris Evans in the studio afterwards and spoke enthusiastically about the work he is doing on the project.

PROJECT UPDATE

With the new Project Director, Eddie Kemsley, now fully in post, work is progressing apace. We have now finalised the internal layout of the buildings and work is progressing with a view to finalising the external layout over the next two weeks. The first set of tenders has been returned for the rebuilding of the Scenic Railway and work will start in the spring.

Adverts will be appearing in the World's Fair next week requesting expressions of interest to restore a number of other rides, and we are looking to acquire a number of additional rides. The rides we are looking to acquire include: Dodgem track (minimum 80' x 40', vintage, with 22/24 cars), Lighthouse Slip (wood or Ali), Caterpillar Ride (vintage, park model), Grasscutter Twist (Edwin Hall or similar type), Octopus, Dive Bomber (double or single arm), Satellite/Trabant, Flying Coaster, Rotor, Ghost Train (vintage).

Nick Laister

Nick Laister (Chairman, The Dreamland Trust)

www.dreamlandmargate.com

www.savedreamland.co.uk

Tales from the Towers: The Unofficial Story Behind Alton Towers, Britain's Most Popular Theme Park

by John Sim

A two hundred-year-old mansion, decaying and largely abandoned. A deep, foreboding valley hosting pretty gardens and dozens of bizarre and unusual structures. A terrifying plunge into Oblivion, and a mysterious alien beast known as Nemesis.

All of these things can be found in one truly unique place: Alton Towers. But how on earth did they get there? The story behind the UK's most popular theme park is just as thrilling and full of twists and turns as the rollercoasters that attract millions to the park every year. Prepare to be sucked into a tale of daring invention, personal tragedy, wanton destruction and brilliant creative minds...

Two hundred years ago, a wealthy earl began the transformation of a barren patch of land in rural Staffordshire into the site of a stunning gothic mansion surrounded by eye-wateringly beautiful gardens. Mocked and ridiculed by his peers for his strange tastes and outlandish ideas, he nevertheless succeeded in attracting people from far and wide to come and marvel at his creations.

Less than 50 years later, the house stood desolate and empty. The genius architect who had helped the earl's successor complete his vision lay dead at 40, having spent many of his final months incarcerated in London's brutal Bedlam mental asylum. How had the mighty fallen so far, so fast? It didn't end there. The earl's descendants fought bitterly over Alton Towers – and with each other – until finally the near-ruined property was sold into private hands in the 1920s.

In Tales from the Towers, you can experience what it was like to visit the estate in its early years as a tourist attraction, when spectacular fetes, fairground rides and exotic animals were all part of the appeal. Finally, you'll find out how an eccentric property developer was able to gain control over the Towers and convert them into Britain's first theme park. You'll learn about the astounding successes that followed, such as the day that riders queued for nine hours to ride the park's first major rollercoaster. And your eyes will widen with amazement as you uncover how the owner's empire came crashing down when he tried to convert one of London's architectural icons into a truly astonishing second theme park.

As well as documenting – for the first time – the full and fascinating history of Alton Towers, *Tales from the Towers* also explains exactly how the park's most popular rides – such as Nemesis, Oblivion and The Smiler – were created. It even takes an in-depth look at rides that were designed for the park but never built, enabling you to take a voyage of discovery and imagine what might have been.

Not only that, but the book is peppered with unusual and interesting facts about the park. You can keep your eyes peeled for the many "hidden secrets" that it highlights during your next trip, adding a fun new dimension to your visit.

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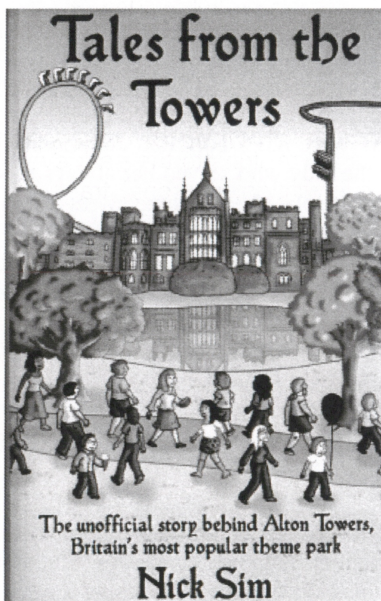
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Enough to Make Your Eyes Water

By Richard Goddard

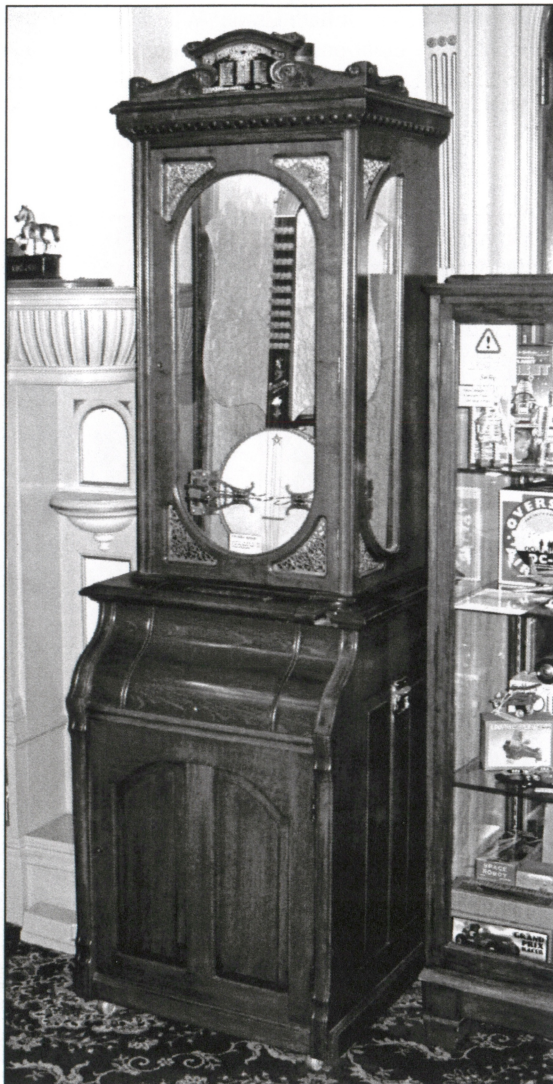
There are certain things in life that you never forget; you may not always be able to instantly recall them, but our senses are some of the most significant elements that assist us in bringing to mind events and memories that occurred a long time ago.

I grew up in the austere post war years of the early 1950s, and in those days sweets were not a common commodity. When my mother went into a local grocery shop the lady who served her always produced a 'little something' for my brother and me; a chocolate bar or some sweets from behind the counter. I was probably only 4 or 5 years old but the feeling of receiving that little luxury and the excitement that it created, burned an indelible memory that I shall not forget, even 60 years later. Every time I pass by the building (now converted to a house) I can still recall the emotion of anticipation and excitement of the visits to that grocery shop.

I suppose we can all recall those kinds of memories that are inextricably linked to emotions and experiences long forgotten but still embedded in our innermost psyche. But what has this got to do with slot machines? Well, another such memory of childhood excitement of being on the pier and in the arcades instantly flashed back into my mind recently when we were staying in Devon. My wife Sally and I were on holiday with our daughter, son-in-law and grandchildren, when I noticed that Watermouth Castle was only about 40 minutes from where we were staying. Jerry has mentioned Watermouth as one of the places to visit and see a collection of slot machines, so fortified with eager anticipation (me, not the grandchildren!) we set off for Ilfracombe, in north Devon.

Watermouth Castle is advertised as a 'Family Theme Park and Castle.' Their advertising flyers and website barely mention that they have slot machines, so I did not expect much. How wrong I was! We all arrived at the castle early, paid our entrance fee and went in. Watermouth is not an arcade in any sense of the meaning; the other 'attractions' (and there are many) certainly take centre stage. However, the first room that the visitor walks into has a very large animated/automaton band on a stage intermittently playing music. This was quite entertaining but against one of the other walls there was a beautiful wood and glass case containing a banjo that caught my eye. On closer inspection I found it was a musical slot machine! I have never seen such a machine before, it was made by *The American Automatic Banjo Co.* of New Jersey.

On insertion of a coin, metal 'finger hooks' plucked at the banjo strings to produce a tune, very unusual. When the machine had finished I turned to go into the next room and standing close to the door was an Ahrens six-sided Crystal Gazer in a lovely condition. I began to think that this place was going to be rather interesting.



The next few rooms were fairly standard in terms of what one would expect from such an attraction, an old kitchen with its equipment from bygone days and rooms from yesteryear etc. However, when we turned into the Hall, there standing in front of me was a Hawkins Clutching Hand merchandiser, full to the brim of prizes and fully working. My excitement grew, and as I approached I noticed another object glinting in an alcove; it was a Bryans Walden Goliath Crane! Where do I go first? What do I look at or play first? Fantastic! My emotions were beginning to get carried away with me and those instant flashbacks of seaside holidays in the arcades and pier were cascading through my mind. Without further ado I took many photos of these machines with my camera for posterity. I could have lingered there for ages but the family had gone into another room and so I therefore followed.



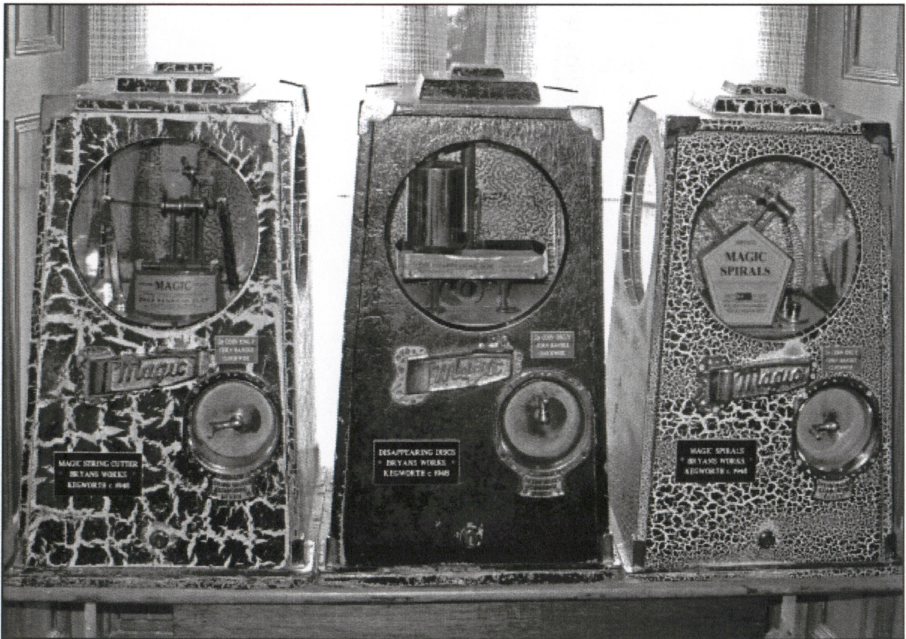
Walton Twins and Clamshell Mutoscope.



Mills Cathedral viewer.

The first thing that greeted us was a very large OO gauge working train set beautifully modelled, but at the end of this long room was yet another feast for any slot collector's hungry eyes. Standing in a line was a Ruffler and Walker two-player Cycle Racer next to a two-player football game (Ahrens?), which was located adjacent to a beautiful clamshell Mutoscope, that in turn stood next to a Walton & Co The Twins machine, all in superb condition.....WOW!!!

By this time the family had gone on into the next room leaving me to dribble over these gems. Having visually feasted upon these machines and taken many more photos, I decided that it would be prudent to catch up with the rest of my folks and resume the tour. However, on my way out of the room, there on a shelf stood a set of Bryans Magic Machines - very nice. At this point I realised that this was not just an ordinary collection of slots but a decidedly select collection put together by a discerning and astute collector of slot machines. A corridor exited the room and half way down standing to attention against a window there was a lovely stereo viewer. I did not notice the maker as I was well behind the rest of my family by this time (it's a Mills Cathedral, probably converted from clockwork to electric operation by Charles Ahrens - Ed.). The experience of seeing these machines was creating a feeling of anticipation and excitement every time I walked into another room.



Full set of Bryans Magic machines – String Cutter, Disappearing Disc and Spirals.

The Castle has its ubiquitous 'dungeon' but this is a dungeon with a difference. As I enthusiastically eased open the large old black door and entered the space beyond, there, housed under the curved vaulted ceilings and whitewashed cell walls were a number of wall machines, mainly allwins, that were being played by all who were passing through these spaces. I heard Sally say to our grandchildren *'look here's one like granddads'* and *'granddad has got one of those.'* At least I had some sort of mild recognition of my long-suffering hobby!

As we passed through these spaces I noticed a collection of about 20 small machines and trade stimulators neatly nestling on shelves built into the alcoves and as I went further into the room there were yet more machines. A Butoview stereo viewer, an Ahrens Palmist, another Mutoscope, a lovely Gypsy Fortune Teller made by the Adelphi Manufacturing Co., housed in a beautifully polished wood and glass case with polished brass trim, a Hope-Bradshaw & Co. Green Ray machine. What a collection this was turning out to be!



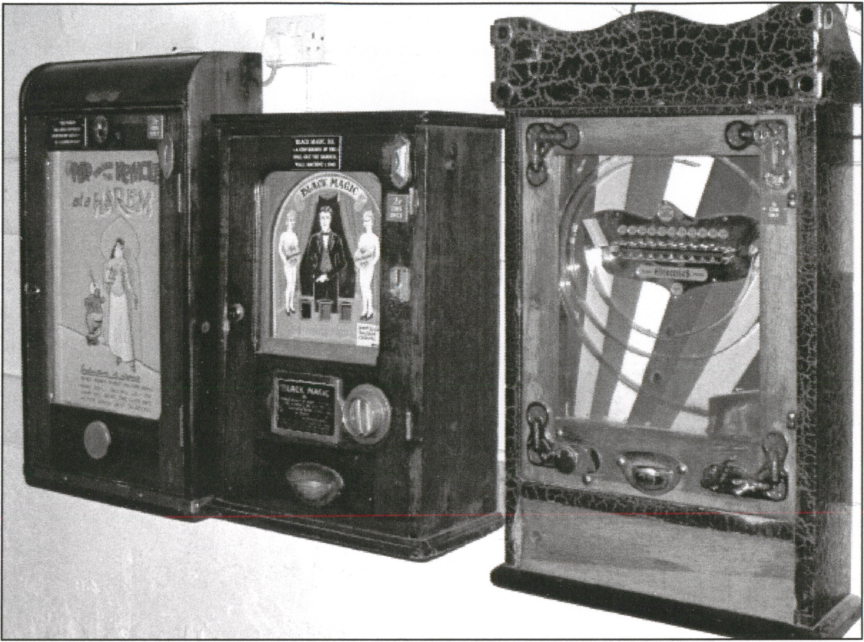
Ahrens Palmist.



Rare Butoview stereo viewer.



Adelphi Manufacturing Co. fortune teller.





Above, Hawtins Clutching Hands merchandiser.

Opposite page, a nice selection of wall machines.

I followed the general flow of these spaces with their delectable contents and as I rounded a corner another group of machines stood waiting, or I should say....beckoning me. A Kiss-O-Meter was wall mounted next to a Chicken Machine, which in turn was adjacent to a Bryans Payramid 1960s version and in the corner stood a very 'chunky' and bold looking strength tester. Close to the strength tester and mounted on the wall was an old Swan Vesta vending machine, looking decidedly timid behind the bold tester. On the end wall was a two-player Monkey Climber, and located incongruously next to the climber was a Punch & Judy Kicker by Nostalgic Machines Ltd., (which made me wonder whether these recently manufactured machines are now becoming collectable).

As I walked out of these series of spaces, family far ahead of me now, I wondered if there were any more slot machines and if so, what would be the next surprise. I did not have long to wait because a little way down a corridor I entered yet another room full of machines. A Bryans six-sided All Square Crane was being played by a number of people and next to this, shoe-horned into a corner, was a Stevenson & Lovett Super Steer-a-Ball and a Rolling Road by Myers Amusements & Automatics Ltd.



Stevenson & Lovett Steer-a-Ball and Myers Road Test.

On the opposite wall a couple of slightly more modern machines, a Peppy The Clown, an electronic big game rifle shooter, an EasyPush coin pusher and a Bell Fruit Cascade. Against another wall there was a Stevenson & Lovett 'Gripteze' strength tester displaying images of naked ladies, which must have been quite risky when it was made in the 1940s. The Gripteze was being 'shouldered' into a corner by another electronic shooter, this time a Coney Island rifle shooting game. As I left this room I felt quite thrilled that I had seen and experienced all these machines during the last hour or so.

When I finally caught up with the family we decided to go into a small theatre to watch a water display shooting up into the air and sequenced to music, which was very good. Contained within this area there were a number of extremely large automaton cabinets, glass fronted, with the workings on display under the puppet scenes. These were very impressive and were started by a push button, no coin needed. We decided to spend the afternoon walking around the garden to find a number of rides for the grandchildren that were advertised in the Watermouth literature.



Some of the machines located externally, outside of the castle.

However, when we left the small theatre space and went outside, there before me were yet more slot machines under cover in a barn-like enclosure. I just could not take all this in by now and off I eagerly went again to investigate. The enclosure contained a large 8 sided 'football' coin pusher, a number of allwins and Bally bandits, a Rotary Merchandiser by the Exhibit Supply Co., a stand-on vibrating massage machine (for tired feet) a Prospector roll-a-coin and a Metal Stamper by Standard-Harvard Metal Typer Inc., which allowed up to 32 characters to be stamped on a token.

By this time the family had got used to me going off at a tangent or 'lagging behind' but when I caught up with them the grandchildren were being entertained by automaton machines that moved to music and were contained in large wooden housings or barrels and operated by push button again. These were located along the paths in the large garden grounds. As we were making our way over to the children's rides and roundabouts I noticed a round innocuous looking timber clad shed-like structure and wondered if there was anything inside.

On entering I could not believe my eyes. Apart from a number of wall and floor machines, there, standing aloof in the centre was a Moonraker!!! This machine was made by Rolite Products (Bridlington) Ltd., and briefly mentioned by Jerry in Mechanical Memories Magazine, issue 33. I have never seen one of these machines and it is enormous, standing around 8 feet tall and about 6 feet diameter, majestically commanding the centre space. It is surrounded by a number of other slots: a Stevenson & Lovett Conveyor, an Oliver Whales space theme allwin, a Bryans All Sport, an Elevenses, a Witches Cave gift vender, a rocket kiddie ride, another Rotary Merchandiser and a Cromptons coin pusher, coincidentally also called a Moonraker.



An interesting Rocket coin-op kiddie ride.

In its day Rolite must have thought that with the design for the Moonraker machine they had '*to boldly go where no man had gone before*' They certainly achieved that, as this really is a *star* at the end of a *trek*. The machine's colourful paint livery is of a metallic glittery finish thus giving an even more 'spaceship' feel to the design with brightly coloured bulbs running down its side ribs. When a coin is inserted it cascades down through a playfield of pins, shaped as stars, and lands upon a moonlike surface with holes in. When one of the holes is full of coins it discharges them into the payout cups; it is a spectacular looking machine.

However, the Moonraker highlight was not '*the final frontier*' of slot machines at Watermouth Castle. Close to the roundabouts and children's rides there was an undercover space with seating to watch 'Captain Andy's Show' and within this space were the final collection of slot machines. Amongst these was another Merchandiser, a six-sided allwin console containing Oliver Whales machines, a grabber, another Standard-Harvard Metal Stamper and a kiddie horse ride.

Watermouth Castle is a superb place to visit, primarily as a family day out but also if you wish to see one of the best collections of slot machines together in one place. All of the machines are on modern coinage, most of them operating on 2p and there are plenty of money changing machines around. I understand that there are almost 200 slots there, however, the bandit collector may not be as enthusiastic as there are only a small handful of Bally machines present. As I noted earlier, it is not an arcade but a collection of machines in small groups located around the premises and grounds. I think they have got the balance right as the slots add to a very interesting 'leisure' experience and as you walk around the place there is always that feeling of anticipation of what is around the next corner.

I mentioned at the beginning of this article that memories can evoke and awaken emotions that are buried deep in our subconscious mind and this visit to Watermouth Castle certainly did that for me, recalling numerous reminiscences of a long time ago and recreating the emotions that sit alongside those recollections.

You cannot buy memories, but I was very happy to pay an entrance fee that opened a pathway leading to those reminiscences of pleasant days of innocent childhood and fun. This is a gluttonous feast for any slot collector; Watermouth Castle certainly made my mouth water. I cannot recommend it highly enough and if you are in the area, it is an absolute must to visit.

Richard Goddard

More 1960s Memories

By Robert Rowland

Here is another of my 1960s memories, but it's not one that gave me much pleasure at the time. The incident took place in the Funland arcade here in Mablethorpe in 1967. It was around 3.00 o'clock on a busy Sunday afternoon, and up to this point it had been an 'ooker' day (this was a word made up by me to denote a very profitable day on the slots). I remember having both front pockets of my jeans full with penny coins, which I had accumulated from various machines throughout the course of the day.

One of my regular machines that I used to play was Cromptons **Spinna-Winna**, which was located at the back end of Funland arcade. It was a fairly large one-sided, three-section machine, with each section having three coin entries (left, centre and right). On insertion of a penny, your coin would drop down onto a revolving steel drum and be supported with steel pins. The coin would then be catapulted up towards a bank of coloured plastic trays, which consisted of five rows of five, making twenty-five trays in total. Each of these individual trays would hold a certain quantity of coins before the accumulated weight would tip the contents of the tray to the player. Any coin that was catapulted over the trays was lost into the machine's cashbox.

Overall, I generally did quite well on this machine. I used to hang around waiting for players to fill the trays up to a level where I hoped the next coin would possibly tip the lot. On average, most trays held anything from about six coins upwards, with the higher up trays holding more.

On this particular day, I was approaching Spinna-Winna and was thrilled at what I saw. One of the higher up trays towards the top right-hand side on section three was three quarters full of pennies. Never before had I seen any tray with so many coins in. I remember thinking "my day just gets better." So I began to play coins into the right-hand side of that three-way coin entry. The odd coin did land in that desired tray but it didn't tip it. I was playing coins in pretty fast and other trays were tipping their contents, also plenty of coins were catapulted beyond the trays and into the lost.

I soon realised my right-hand pocket was out of coins, so I dipped into my left pocket and continued playing, hoping that the next coin would be the one to tip the lot, which by this time must have been about thirty coins. Eventually, Spinna-Winna just cleaned me out of pennies from both pockets. That one tray never tipped its load, despite it by now overflowing.

My loss that day was the biggest single loss that I had ever taken on any one slot machine. I estimated I ended up losing about eight bob on that machine, which was a lot of money back then. OK, I had won most of it in the first place anyway, but that still didn't make it any easier.

I walked out of Funland not very happy. After that, all I can remember was about an hour later I went back, and the full tray was still there. Thinking back, it's almost certain that the operator had tinkered with that specific tray. At the time, I thought it may possibly have been glued somehow.

Anyway, I left and made my way home – what else could I do? When Funland opened the next day, I was one of the first in. I made my way to Spinna-Winna but that overflowing tray now only held a couple of pennies – maybe one of the mechanics had tipped it by hand. I never saw any single tray that full of coins again. Was it a little experiment by the operator? Or maybe just something random that had happened preventing that one tray from tipping? Whatever the reason, after that incident I was always very wary of any full trays on the Spinna-Winna.

More 1960s memories next month.

Robert Rowland

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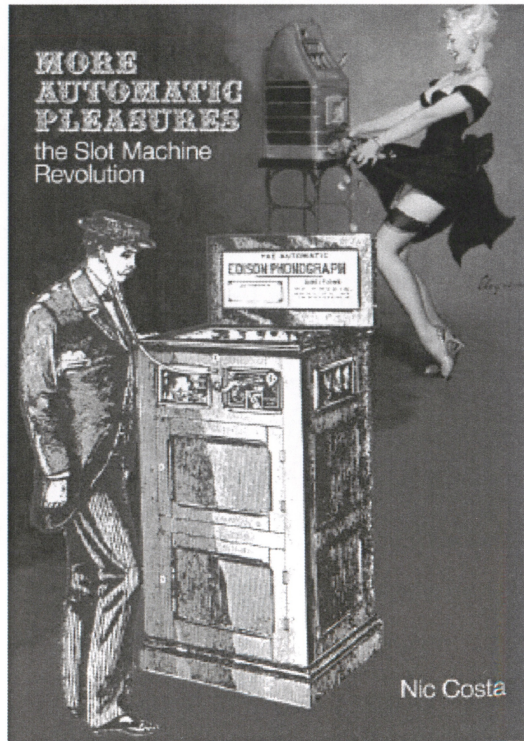
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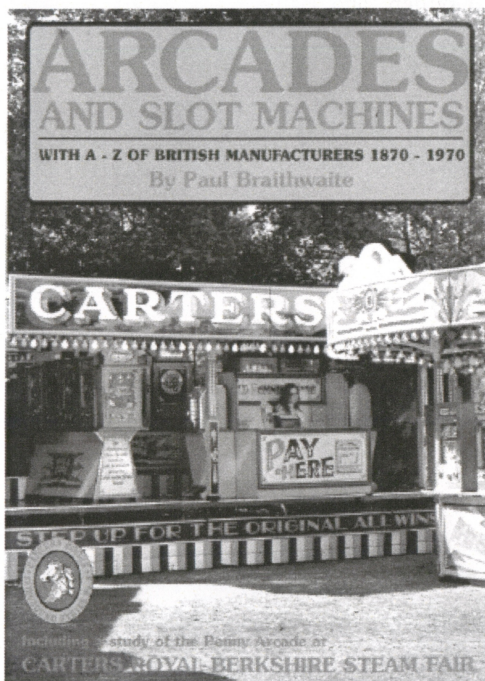
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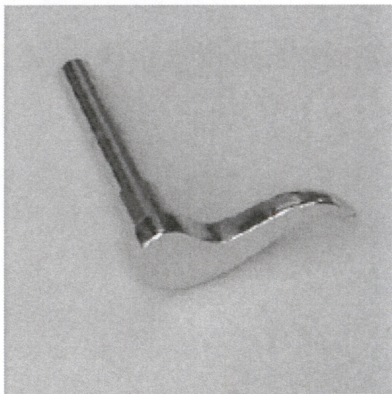
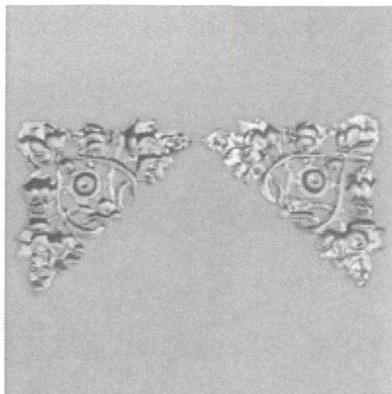
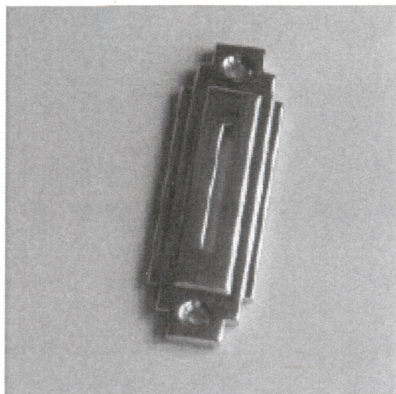
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